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DAKAR PLS PASS RAO, ODC, AND DAO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/28/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GA](#)

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PASSES "FORMER PRESIDENTS' BILL"

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

BENEFITS FOR FORMER GAMBIAN PRESIDENTS

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**¶11.** (U) The National Assembly recently approved a "Former Presidents' Bill" providing a benefits package for former Gambian Presidents serving at least two terms. According to media reports, the package includes a monthly stipend of 50,000 dalasis (approx. dols 1,700) and other assorted benefits, e.g. two government-paid staffers, three vehicles, and round-the-clock security detail. Presenting the bill to the National Assembly, Vice President Isatou Njie-Saidy said the measure was designed to "create a conducive environment for former Presidents to continue to contribute effectively to national development." Portraying the bill as an effort to promote good governance, the Vice President said it was "essential" to provide "commensurate economic and physical security and respect" to the country's former leaders.

THE IMMEDIATE BENEFICIARY

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**¶12.** (U) The sole immediate beneficiary of the new legislation is The Gambia's first President, Dawda Jawara, who governed from the country's achieving independence in 1965 until his overthrow in 1994 by the second and current President, Yahya Jammeh. In conversation with Ambassador and Poloff, a local media consultant who also serves as advisor to Jawara, claimed to have personally drafted the bill. The consultant asserted that the measure was consistent with the well-publicized reconciliation in recent years between Jawara and his successor. The source added that Jawara would now have the resources needed to play an active role in a group, "African Forum" comprising former Africa Presidents -- a role encouraged by Jammeh, according to the consultant.

COMMENT

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**¶13.** (C) Our initial impression is that the "Former Presidents' Bill" is more a favor by Jammeh to his predecessor than a move to promote good governance by encouraging Gambian leaders to limit their tenure -- or forego attempts to return to power -- via the prospect of financial and other blandishments. The elderly Jawara, by all accounts, no longer has political ambitions and poses no threat to Jammeh's hold on power. Jammeh himself, who has governed continuously since 1994, first as junta leader and subsequently as elected civilian President, shows no sign of an early relinquishing of power. Only 41, he was elected in September to a third consecutive five-year term and has publicly vowed to remain President for the next 30 to 40 years. END COMMENT

STAFFORD